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SUBJECT: Paktika Tribal Leaders Request Extension of Voter
Registration

Summary

¶1. As phase three voter registration proceeds in Paktika province, on January 6 the Independent Election Commission organized a shura to conduct public outreach in support of the IEC and to encourage the leaders of Paktika's tribes to support the voter registration (VR) process. Governor Khpalwak, Provincial Election Official (PEO) Taj Ali Waziri, Provincial Council (PC) members, ANP Commander Dawlat Khan, and approximately two hundred tribal shura leaders from Paktika's sixteen largest districts participated in the meeting in Paktika's capital Sharana. Although VR is proceeding satisfactorily in many of Paktika's districts, security problems (including Taliban threats and the kidnapping of two district field coordinators) and long distances to VR sites have delayed or hindered registration in some districts. Reflecting these concerns and at the unanimous request of the tribal leaders, the PEO will forward to the IEC their request for a one-month extension of the VR period in Paktika.

Despite Setbacks, VR Proceeding Throughout Paktika

¶2. The shura took place as VR entered its fourth week in Paktika. Its purpose was to consolidate the support of Paktika's five major tribes for the successful continuation of the VR process against the backdrop of progress and challenges thus far. As of January 9, according to the PEO, 75,915 residents (41,793 men and 34,122 women) have registered to vote. Although VR sites are now functioning in all of Paktika's nineteen official districts, problems have arisen in several districts. For example, in Gayan district, where Taliban influence is strong, VR did not open until January 4, following a PRT-facilitated visit by the Governor, PEO, and Provincial Council members to press the district's tribal leaders to support VR. The District Field Coordinator (DFC) of Yusuf Khel district was kidnapped by the Taliban and later released, while in Waza Khwa district the DFC, along with a tribal leader, was kidnapped and has not been released.

Provincial Leaders Call on Tribes to Support VR

¶3. Some 200 tribal leaders from Paktika's Suleimankhel, Zadran, Kharoti, Andar and Waziri tribes attended the shura. Governor Khpalwak represented the provincial government, along with PC Chairman Dr. Nawab Waziri, PC Spokesperson Jumadin Gayanwal, PC member Dr. Amina (in an exceedingly rare appearance by a female PC member), and Provincial Police Commander Dawlat Khan. The PEO, who had received funding from the IEC to host the event, opened the program with a short speech reporting the progress of the VR process in the province so far. He encouraged the tribesmen of Paktika to preserve their right to vote in the next presidential election by supporting VR in their districts.

¶4. Governor Khpalwak told the tribal leaders that the people of Paktika should be independent in selecting leaders they believe will best serve Afghanistan. The Governor stressed that by encouraging voter registration the leaders will enable their communities to choose a better future for their people and their country. He explained that the Holy Quran teaches that every person has the right to select his leaders, and the constitution of Afghanistan guarantees to every individual the right to vote for the type of Government he wants for his country.

¶5. Provincial Council Chairman Dr. Nawab Waziri (a 2008 International Visitor Program participant) said that Afghanistan fought holy wars against enemy occupations in the past in order to have a democratic government, and the people are now free to select their leaders. He said that Pashtuns have paid dearly with the blood of their leaders who sacrificed to preserve democracy, and the people must now ensure that democracy succeeds. Dr. Waziri encouraged the tribesmen not to be careless with this heritage and to use this opportunity to choose a bright future for Afghanistan.

Tribes Ask for One-Month Extension of VR Period

¶6. In their speeches, tribal leaders from Orgun, Naka, Ziruk, Gomal, Yusef Khel, Bermel, and Khair Kot districts unanimously called for extending the voter registration period for Paktika by one more month in order to meet the targeted number of registrants. Abdul Qadir, a leader from the Kharoti tribe in Gomal district, said that in Paktika province only approximately 50 percent of the people over the age of 18 have registered so far. Therefore, he said, it is important to extend the registration period as there are not

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sufficient VR sites for the residents to reach them in the time currently allotted. He said that in some parts of Gomal district it takes at least two hours driving time to reach the voter registration (VR) site. (Note: Despite the longstanding focus of the PRT, CF engineering battalions, and USAID on road construction, in all of Paktika province there are still only some fifty to sixty miles of paved roads, and road security in much of the province has deteriorated in the past year. End note.)

¶7. On behalf of all the tribal leaders present at the meeting, Governor Khpalwak suggested that the PEO request the IEC to extend the time of the VR process in Paktika province for at least another month. The PEO will forward this request to the IEC in coordination with Regional Election Coordinator for Afghanistan's southeast region. The Regional Coordinator informed PRT State officer on January 9 that mobile units might be made available beyond the official VR end date. IEC headquarters reports that, if donor funding is made available, it plans to stage between one and three mobile registration teams in each province until July. Those provinces with more residents or more inaccessible areas will receive the larger number of teams. Voters will also be able to register at provincial capital offices until the summer cutoff date.

WOOD